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# The Industrial Policies of the Young Women's Christian Association

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NEARLY fifteen years ago two things happened which have determined the policy and development of the industrial work in the Young Women's Christian Association up to the present time. First, out of early futile efforts to carry the Association program, and through it the "life abundant," to the young women working in industrial establishments in this country, the members of the industrial department had come to the place in 1908 where they began to get an idea that people ought to do things for themselves—that the only way, after all, to develop girls was to give them a chance to develop themselves.

## THE SOCIAL CREED OF THE CHURCHES

Something else happened in the same year. The Protestant churches began to realize the necessity for a more unified front for Protestantism and combined to form the Federal Council of Churches of Christ in America. The broad vision of this body led it to stimulate an interest among the churches in social conditions, particularly in working conditions and the everyday life of working people. This attitude on the part of the churches expressed in their social creed led the Association to see that it must be concerned with something more than just the individual girl; that it ought to concern itself with her social and economic environment, with the conditions of her daily life and work. The social creed of the churches spoke frankly about these matters; it called for the abolition of child labor; for

such regulation of the conditions of toil for women as should safeguard the physical and moral health of the community; the abatement and prevention of poverty; the protection of the individual and society from the social, economic and moral waste of the liquor traffic. It advocated a living wage as a minimum in every industry.

## Y. W. C. A. CONVENTIONS

### *The Berlin Conference.*—

Shortly after this, in 1910, the World's Young Women's Christian Association at the Berlin Conference had as one of its topics "The Industrial and Social Awakening." It fell to the Young Women's Christian Association of America to present that subject and to offer recommendations. The World's Y. W. C. A. Committee sent to all countries a questionnaire asking what the Associations of each country had done to meet the industrial and social situation. One of the questions was "What do you believe about the possibility of the social teachings of Christ being applied to the social order of today?" The answers poured in from the four corners of the earth. It was the English women who had seen farthest. They had come together in some of the labor conferences in Manchester and decided that Christianity had really something very definite to do and to say in the face of the industrial situation. At Berlin it was a French woman who was insistent that the teachings of Jesus formed the true foundation for a social program.

*Going on record for the first time.—*

Thus the charter for the development of the work of the Young Women's Christian Association in its industrial life was agreed upon. It recognized, first, that the social "teachings of Jesus Christ are the basis of the right social life of women" and, further, that there was need of a "study of the social industrial problems of the day by an investigation of the physical and economic requirements of working women, by studying the means of amelioration which legislation and private endeavor offer, and by a careful examination of organizations among working women." This action of the conference was sent back to every national organization, and every Association of the World's Committee was asked to accept it as its own charter. It was the beginning of a whole new era in the life of the Association. Further than this the Association states that it will seek to advance the social and intellectual development of its members by making adequate provision for recreation and for social intercourse between young men and young women; furthering physiological teaching and training for home making; and arranging courses which shall promote the efficiency of commercial and industrial workers and give them wise teaching concerning the social and protective legislation enacted in their behalf.

*The Indianapolis Convention.—*

In its national convention in Indianapolis in 1911 the American Association went still further and said "that the Association shall seek to educate public opinion regarding the need of establishing a minimum living wage and of regulating hours of labor compatible with the physical health and development of wage-earners; that the Association shall declare its belief in

the rights of *women* over sixteen years of age, in good health, working a full day, to a living wage which shall insure her the possibility of a virtuous livelihood; that the Association recognizing the necessity of legislation for the regulation of hours and wages for wage-earners in industry and trade hereby expresses its sympathy with the great purpose of securing the determination by law of a minimum living wage for women."

*Development of Membership.—*

The Association was changing from that type of work in which it was doing *for* girls and thinking *for* them to that in which it began to feel the solidarity of the whole human family. The realization of humanity as God's temple was beginning. Futile efforts to produce and offer a program that would win girls through its own attractiveness gave way to offering an opportunity for them to find means of development for their various interests. Noon meetings in the factories, big down-town buildings running a formal schedule, and ready-made activities tended to be replaced by a less formal program planned and developed by the girls when they realized that their expressed needs could be filled by less formal buildings in sections of the community most accessible to the girls needing them, by group work which developed the program it needed and wanted along the lines of its largest interests.

Self-governing clubs soon appeared. These sent representatives to industrial councils which began to meet in the summer of 1912 to discuss the development of a program for the industrial membership. From such subjects as recreation, the welfare form of social service, etc., they have gradually become absorbed in the consideration of such questions as the underlying economic causes of war, the

coöperative movement, the implications of citizenship and legislation, and vital education. Recommendations from these councils become the program basis for the following year's activity.

*The Washington Conference.—*

In 1919 the first national industrial conference of the Young Women's Christian Association met in Washington with the consent of the executive committee of the National Board. Here again the girls made statements of the aims which they believed the Association should support them in trying to attain, if they are to live a life which is in any sense adequate.

*The Cleveland Convention.—*

The result of this statement from the industrial membership was the adoption at Cleveland by the whole Association of the social ideals of the Federal Council of Churches, including the resolutions of 1919. This did two things: It gave the united support of the Association to the effort to embody Christian ideals in concrete and living forms, and in so doing it gave to the industrial membership a new sense of responsibility for the whole of which they are a part.

*The Hot Springs Convention.—*

The presence at the Cleveland Convention of a number of our industrial members as delegates from local Associations gave happy augury of the goodly number of industrial girls and women who attended the 1922 convention at Hot Springs. In spite of the fact that this has been one of several years of unemployment and that Hot Springs is a great distance from the industrial centers, many girls attended. Associations planned to send industrial girls as delegates and the convention invited student and industrial groups to be responsible for a part of the convention program.

The industrial girls in this national assembly discussed questions of vital import to their life and work, such as "Unemployment," "What Is Religion," and "Student-Industrial Fellowship," and appointed a committee to serve in the interim between such national assemblies. The function of this committee will be to call assemblies of the industrial women in the Young Women's Christian Association and to coöperate with the national industrial committee in the development of its work.

The greatest enlargement of vision came in the joint sessions at Hot Springs when the students and industrial girls formed a new comradeship. These groups had met at Cleveland and learned their community of interest in the Association. They had, in the two years between, studied together in their local Associations and visited each other's conferences and they came together here to discuss their shared experiences. The college girl, in entering the world of practical work which the industrial girl knows so well, had found a new world open to her, and the industrial girl at college, where the coveted opportunity for education is at last realized, had discovered a new basis for fellowship and understanding.

The discussion of the industrial assembly opened on unemployment, with its crippling, dwarfing and deadening effect upon life. It closed with the student industrial session when industrial girls spoke of how they had been enabled through the Association to take advantage of the larger life offered to them. The observer could scarcely avoid the impression that the future can safely be trusted to the hands of young people who are eager for education in order to gain such understanding of the whole of life that they may help to realize a Christian order in industry.